

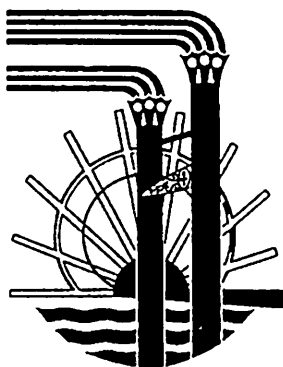
TAKING A TOUR

Walking through the "Belle Of Louisville" is a step through history made even more interesting by the little pieces of information that compose the story of this proud lady's journey through time. Hers is a rich language of tradition and river-faring terms, her heritage a way of life.

Starting At The Bottom

Passengers board the boat by entering onto the Main Deck - the deck just above the water line that forms the roof of the hull. Here is where the steam is produced and the paddlewheel is turned.

Near the head (front or bow end) of the boat is the Boiler Room - aptly named for the 3 gigantic boilers containing water that is heated with fuel oil to produce steam. Nearly 80 gallons of fuel oil will be needed each hour to provide enough steam to propel the boat at a rate of 6 - 7 miles per hour.



Storage lockers that were once sleeping rooms for crew members and a small galley fill the space under the overhead system of pipes that convey the steam from the boilers to all other areas of the vessel.

At the stern (rear) of the Main Deck is the Engine Room housing two simple high-pressure engines (one on each side of the boat) that turn the paddlewheel to move the boat forward or backward and the generators that provide electricity while the "Belle" is operating under her own power.

On The Way Up

Above the Main Deck is the Boiler Deck, easily named for its position above the boilers. On the "Belle" it is often referred to as the "Ballroom Deck" or "Dance Floor". Interest-

ingly enough, though the boat was originally built to serve a ferry and freight trade, her construction included a dance floor in anticipation of her future use as an excursion boat. The central staircase that passengers climb as they board the "Belle" leads directly onto the hardwood dance floor.

Even through structural and programmatic changes over the years, the dance floor is still the focal point for passengers and the hub of activity during the operating season.

The bandstand is nestled into an alcove at the stern of the boat on the Boiler Deck, and small, rectangular windows (originally "skylights") can be seen at the ceiling on the back (or "aft") wall of the bandstand. They are the only remaining evidence of an earlier time when the dance floor was enclosed and similar windows were found on both sides of the floor above doorways that opened onto open decking on both sides of the boat. On hot days passengers could easily leave the dance floor to enjoy a cool breeze and quiet conversation.

Of particular importance on this deck is the boat's pressed-tin ceiling that spans the area between the concession and souvenir stands at the head of the boat. Riverboat enthusiasts have been heard to remark on the unusual ceiling, as it is original to the Belle and is as rare as it is beautiful.

Going Even Higher

Early river steamboats were designed with only two decks, but in the 1840's - about the same time as Texas was being admitted to the Union - 3-deck vessels were becoming a common sight. In long-established tradition, passenger accommodations were named after states in the Union, and were referred to as "staterooms" for that reason. The largest single cabin was located on the highest deck, so it was fittingly named after the largest state in the Union at the time. It was, therefore, called the "Texas Cabin" and the deck the "Texas Deck". The tradition of naming rooms after states did not typically continue on to steamboats placed in service after the turn of the century, and rooms took on more practical names instead. On the "Belle", though the covered portion of the third deck is still called